

JACKBOOTS, WHITE HOODS, AND THE WHITE BIBLE:  
THE FUSION OF THE KKK, AMERICAN NAZIS, AND CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

by

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PREVIEW

## ABSTRACT

JOSEPH GABRIEL WOOD. Jackboots, White Hoods, and the White Bible: The Fusion of the KKK, the American Nazi Movement, and Christian Identity.

During the tumultuous twentieth century, three visually and dogmatically distinct white supremacist movements came together to bring forth a mostly unified front against their common enemies—integration, miscegenation, and various elaborate fictional conspiracies. At times antagonistic to one another, by November 1979, the stage was set for the beginnings of a movement rooted in solidarity. This thesis seeks to answer how and why the early distrust between the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Movement developed, as well as how this was overcome through the near-universal adoption of a fringe, conspiracy-minded branch of Protestant Christianity. By tracing the biographies of these organizations and movements during key moments in history, this thesis will answer the question of how and when the movements prior to 2001 came together and laid the groundwork for modern, nebulous partnerships during the twenty-first century.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Tabitha, Rory, Angie and Mike, Cereeta and Joe, Charity, and everyone else who said I should have done this ten years ago.

PREVIEW

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## Abbreviations

|                                              |       |
|----------------------------------------------|-------|
| American Nazi Movement                       | ANM   |
| American Nazi Party                          | ANP   |
| British Israelism                            | BI    |
| Black Panther Party                          | BPP   |
| Citizen's Law Enforcement Research Committee | CLERC |
| Christian Identity Movement                  | CIM   |
| Fascist League of North America              | FLNA  |
| German American Bund                         | GAB   |
| Ku Klux Klan                                 | KKK   |
| Northwest Territorial Imperative             | NTI   |
| Sovereign Citizen Movement                   | SCM   |
| Sheriff's Posse Comitatus                    | SPC   |
| United Klans of America                      | UKA   |
| United Racist Front                          | URF   |
| US Christian Posse Association               | USCPA |

## Introduction

On November 3, 1979, an unarmed protest bloc in Greensboro, North Carolina, faced an armed mass of belligerents named the United Racist Front (URF). After ninety seconds of gunfire, five protestors lay dead, and an additional twelve sustained injuries resulting from this calculated assault. The attacking party, a semi-cohesive alliance of Ku Klux Klansmen (KKK) and American Nazi Party (ANP) members, heralded the dawn of a radical, diffuse syncretism that would culminate in the birth of an “Alt-Right” and a ubiquitous, idiosyncratic online presence.<sup>1</sup>

The attacks, later known as the “Greensboro Massacre,” left Cesar Cauce, Dr. James "Jim" Waller, William Evan Sampson, Sandra Neely Smith, and Dr. Michael Nathan dead. All of those killed were highly educated union activists: Dr. James Waller was a professor at Duke University before establishing the Carolina Brown Lung Association, while Dr. Michael Nathan was chief of pediatrics at Lincoln Community Health Center. Their murderers had met several weeks before to form the URF in anticipation of an armed encounter with the protest bloc, led by the Communist Worker's Party, formerly the Worker's Viewpoint Organization, and the Youth Organization for Black Unity, led by Nelson Johnson. An all-white jury acquitted the Klansmen and Nazis responsible for the Greensboro Massacre with little deliberation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> While the scope of this thesis falls short of the promulgation of far-right ideology through the internet and social media, and stops well short of Richard Spencer's declaration of an “Alt-Right,” this thesis provides the contextual background necessary for the emergence of such post-factional tendencies.

<sup>2</sup> “Acquittal in Greensboro,” *New York Times*, Apr 18, 1984;

The Worker's Viewpoint Organization changed its name to the Communist Worker's Party on October 19, 1979, though the first planned event, a conference following the planned protest in Greensboro, never happened.

Additionally, many of the notable events prior to the Greensboro Massacre were from before the organization's name change and Party Congress. For the sake of clarification and continuity, Worker's Viewpoint Organization will be used. See:

Paul C. Bermanzohn, M.D. and Sally A. Bermanzohn, *The True Story of the Greensboro Massacre* (New York: César Cauce Publishers and Distributors, 1980), 11-14.

The Greensboro Massacre would be a harbinger of the closing decades of the 20th century in the realm of American white supremacy movements. Before the Greensboro Massacre, few attempts were made to unite the KKK, which held itself as a patriotic group, with the American Nazi Movement (ANM), which variously sought a violent national revolution or the establishment of all-white breakaway states. The repercussions of the attack in Greensboro highlighted several distinct aspects of the conception of a united white nationalist front, many of which would not be felt until well after the movement began. For example, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the rigid ideological divisions would become more nebulous, especially with the growing ubiquity of message boards and social media. Additionally, a united white nationalist front required the unification of several different reactionary and revolutionary movements.<sup>3</sup>

To unite the KKK and the ANM, the right conditions needed to exist: the dissemination of the Christian Identity Movement (CIM) from the edge of mainstream right-wing Christianity to more accessible positions, the embrace of anti-communism by the KKK as the most significant threat to the Western world, and the loss of the segregation and Civil Rights fight by Klansmen in the southern United States. Once these groups began open dialogues and joint rallies throughout the 1980s, a new era of terrorism and violence started to grip the United States in the 1990s. This thesis explores both the histories that led to the unification of the KKK and ANM during the Greensboro Massacre, as well as religious trends that carried on throughout the decades following.

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<sup>3</sup> “Christofascism” as a term comes from the provocative liberation theology of Dorothy Sölle. Historically, groups such as the Silver Legion of America are considered “clero-fascist,” though semantically, this requires the leading figures of a fascist-totalitarian movement also be ecumenical or clerical in some capacity. With the less rigid structure of American evangelical Protestantism, “Christofascism” makes more sense. For an overview, see Sölle, Dorothee. *The Window of Vulnerability: A Political Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

This thesis utilizes a biographical approach to the groups that helped form the modern white supremacy movement. While this approach contains three separate chronologies, combining them into a cohesive, chronological story would yield an incomprehensible narrative. Understanding the three separate narratives enables understanding of the convergence of these movements into one based on solidarity with overall goals. In observing how the leadership and prominent members of certain organizations connect to one another, the overall ideological direction, as well as the internal issues and public perception of each of these movements, forms a road map.

The ideological origins of these movements, while separate, converge around the time of the Greensboro Massacre. The period from 1979 to the 1990s is often labeled the “White Power Movement,” though the specifics and direction of this movement, driven by the racist-skinhead punk scene and informal organization, falls outside the scope of this thesis.

### The Importance of Semantics

The explosion of a diverse and seemingly contradictory ideology within a unified far-right resulted from pseudo-solidarity tendencies that developed within the far-right following the civil rights movement and the “New Left” push of the 1960s and 1970s. However, these pseudo-solidarity tendencies of the various right-wing hate groups and ethno-terrorist cells make more sense with a dramatic change in semantics. A more pertinent phrase to convey the habit of uniting under temporary or permanent “umbrella movements” while retaining the original organizations' semiotic understandings and communications might be “arrested factionalization.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The reason for not classifying the URF and modern synthesis groups as “solidarity” movements is twofold: first, solidarity discourse is explicitly derived from leftist ideology, specifically Durkheim and Kropotkin. As such, it seems inappropriate to classify “marriages of convenience” within the far-right as solidarity movements. Second,

To better understand the requisite mental gymnastics for members of groups like the “United Racist Front,” a reader need only look to the foundational history of the groups involved: in this case, the KKK and the American Nazi Party. These two movements' leaders and theorists stood at odds with one another, with these conflicts and confrontations sometimes erupting into verbal and physical assault, especially in the years following the Second World War. Two things would ultimately serve to change this, though—the publication of William L. Pierce’s *The Turner Diaries* and underground reprints of *The Protocols of the Meetings of the Learned Elders of Zion*.<sup>5</sup> The nature of these works would allow for an easily spread conspiracy capable of reaching and radicalizing individuals who would otherwise have no contact with white nationalism or ethno-terrorism.

With the rapid dissemination of these two works throughout the already radical far-right ranks, several prominent Klansmen and Nazis latched onto the idea of a “white genocide” plot. This conspiracy theory, already ancient, would influence Grand Dragon Virgil Lee Griffin of Mount Holly’s KKK chapter and Harold Covington, variously of the Rhodesian Bush War and the Chapel Hill chapter of the National Socialist White People’s Party (NSWPP), to meet at a remote farm in Louisburg, North Carolina. This meeting would end up forming the first publicly visible unified white supremacist movement.<sup>6</sup>

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most of these unification tendencies seem to be temporary and event-based, sometimes lasting only a single march: solidarity is meant to be long-term cooperation by distinct ideological groups over the course of a struggle.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Abanes, *American Militias* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 137-139.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Weaton, *Codename GREENKIL: The 1979 Greensboro Killings* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1987).

### A Note on Sources

This thesis was originally intended to rely on primary sources scattered throughout the United States, held in university collections, personal collections, and small museums. With the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020, I was unable to access many of these sources that I had planned on using throughout. As such, this thesis necessarily took on a new direction, utilizing digitized newspaper clippings as the typical primary source.

PREVIEW

## The Ku Klux Klan

### Historiography

The Lost Cause mythos, which was the trend in Southern apologist scholarship deemphasizing or ignoring the role of slavery and Southern belligerence, developed in the years immediately following the Civil War. The Lost Cause found, as its earliest proponents, journalists such as Edward A. Pollard and retired Confederate officers like Jubal Early, who spread the notion that slavery was relatively unimportant to the *casus belli* of the Civil War. While this initially only spread through the ranks of the Southern Aristocracy, it was the publication of works like "The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government" by Jefferson Davis and memorializations such as Confederate Decoration Day—a precursor to Memorial Day—that brought a softening of the reasoning for the Civil War within the minds of not only average Southerners, but people in the North as well. With time and the generational removal of factual antebellum memory, the "War of Northern Aggression" became a question of nationalistic loyalty and duty.<sup>7</sup>

Early historiographical trends highlight the duty aspect of not only Southern Secession, but of the Ku Klux Klan and the later White Man's League and Red Shirt militias. In eulogizing Robert E. Lee following the general's death, Jubal Early characterized the Southern ethos as "unselfish patriotism and Christian purity" best exemplified by Robert E. Lee's character, while President Lincoln was "calling for troops to make an unconstitutional war on the seceded States." Likewise, Edward A. Pollard promoted similar sentiments in "The Lost Cause: A New Southern

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<sup>7</sup> Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1881).

History of the War of the Confederates," a sensationalist pseudohistory published the year after the Civil War's conclusion.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the last decade of the 19th century, the newly founded American Historical Association (AHA) would lead the push in normalizing the Lost Cause as the historical norm within American academic history. Thus, by the early 1900s, the Lost Cause was the mainstream narrative about the Civil War. Following the early AHA model, historians such as Frederick Jackson Turner, president of the AHA in 1910, reframed the Civil War to be about "states' rights" or economics rather than Slavery. de-emphasized or omitted slavery's effects on American History. This would serve two systematic functions in history: it ensured that any competing narrative would be "revisionist" and it served to reinforce Jim Crow codes throughout the United States.<sup>9</sup>

Turner, writing primarily on the American frontier, framed it in relation to the legacy of slavery and the Civil War: "When American history comes to be rightly viewed, it will be seen that the slavery question is an incident. In the period from the first half of the present century to the close of the Civil War, slavery rose to primary, but far from exclusive importance... The legislation which most developed the powers of the national government and played the largest part in its activity, was conditioned on the frontier." The KKK did not often make an appearance in these historical works, but when they did it was in the guise of a fraternal order resisting Federal military occupation and quenching potential race riots. The indubitable irony of this

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<sup>8</sup> Jubal A. Early, *The Campaigns of Gen. Robert E. Lee, An Address* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1872); Edward A. Pollard, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (New York: E.B. Treat & Co, 1866).

<sup>9</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner* (New York: Henry Holy, 1994): 48.

sentiment is the massacres and racist insurrections by the Red Shirts and the White Man's League that characterized part of Reconstruction.

The Dunning School, named after William Archibald Dunning, sought to further solidify the narrative of Reconstruction from a Southern "Redeemer" Democrat viewpoint. To Dunning School scholars, Reconstruction was not only a military occupation of the South, it was fully punitive against the entire southern populace. Groups like the KKK and the Red Shirts found a home in Dunning School works as underdog resistance movements—partisans against the oppression of a foreign government. To these scholars, foremost among them Dunning, who was president of the AHA in 1913. Reconstruction became a push for the utter destruction of the South by southern Republican scalawags and carpetbaggers from the North. Slavery, an institution that just so happened to be ended by the Civil War, was a benign institution that was an integral part of Southern society and a civilizing mission that dared to stand against the Utopian Socialists of the 19th century. The Civil War, and by extension, the KKK and white supremacist paramilitary groups, were defending the Southern homeland as part of their nationalistic duty.<sup>10</sup>

One of the foremost Lost Cause historians that helped reform the KKK's image was Woodrow Wilson, President of Princeton from 1902-1910, President of the United States from 1913-1921, and AHA president in 1924, the year of his death. Due to Wilson's close personal connection with Thomas Dixon, author of *The Clansman*, much of Dixon's work embodies Wilsonian history. Many of the sentiments written about by Dixon in regards to the necessity of the KKK and white supremacist paramilitarism during Reconstruction came from Wilson and the

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<sup>10</sup> William Archibald Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865–1877* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1907); many of the works of his PhD students out of Columbia University also belong to the Dunning School. A comprehensive analysis of the Dunning School and its effect on American History can be found in *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, edited by John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery.

Dunning School. Wilson's histories were the most prominent example of historians utilizing the existence of the KKK, Red Shirts, and White Man's League as proof that the South needed to defend itself against servile insurrection and Northern interloping during reconstruction. Thus, the popular conception in the 1910s and 1920s of the KKK as heroic defenders of Southern sovereignty was born. Writing on the issue in *A History of the American People*, a seminal work of the time, Wilson paints a bleak picture of Republican policies and society:

"In the villages and country-sides, the negroes themselves were the office-holders, men who could not so much as write their names and who knew none of the uses of authority except its insolence...It was there [in the villages] that the policy of the congressional leaders wrought its perfect work of fear, demoralization, disgust, and social revolution. No one who thought justly or tolerantly could think that this veritable overthrow of civilization in the South had been foreseen or desired by the men who had followed Mr. Stevens and Mr. Wade and Mr. Morton in their policy of rule or ruin. That handful of leaders were proof against both fact and reason in their determination to 'put the white South under the heel of the black South.'"<sup>11</sup>

In the decades following the emergence of the Dunning School and Wilson's history, the Lost Cause history and its necessitation of the KKK met with little resistance from dissenting academics. Some of the most vocal critics were black historians, most notably W. E. B. Du Bois. In his critical 1935 work, *Black Reconstruction in America*, Du Bois painstakingly charts the cohesion of Southern society following the end of the Civil War. The breakdown of society, Du Bois notes throughout, is down to paramilitary groups such as the Red Shirts and the White Man's League, also noting the relative inefficacy of the KKK during Reconstruction. Du Bois's rebuttal to Dunning School historians engages in a material analysis of society during reconstruction, much in line with Marxist historians, and provides a more objective and balanced analysis of Reconstruction society. The suppression of Reconstruction aims, Du Bois posited,

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<sup>11</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *A History of the American People, Vol. 5: Reunion and Nationalization* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1918): 49-50.

was down to the seizure of power by wealthy white Democrats from the hands of Republicans and Fusionists. In this light, the white paramilitaries of the mid-to-late 19th century appear as thugs working for the reestablishment of their own hegemony in the face of the fear of a freedman takeover.<sup>12</sup>

By the 1960s, more critical approaches in line with Du Bois's painstaking work began to appear by scholars such as William Peirce Randel, an English professor and director of American Studies at Florida State University. His 1965 monograph, *\*The Ku Klux Klan: A Century of Infamy\** illustrated the savage nature of KKK behavior. Much of his monograph is devoted to Reconstruction, and he interacts with much of the same source material as W. E. B. Du Bois. However, as several contemporaries of the time note, Randel's work falls flat in several major areas, among them, the relationship between the KKK, class, and region. Instead, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography" by Bernard Weisberger seems to be the quintessential historical work from the time dealing with Reconstruction. A historiography, it nonetheless serves as a focal point for the history of Reconstruction in the 1950s and 1960s, providing scholars from 1959 onwards a comprehensive examination of useful scholarship—three monographs by C. Vann Woodward (two in 1951 and one in 1955), and "The Scalawag in Mississippi Reconstruction" by T. Harry Williams, among many others. Weisberger's article, while serving its role as a historiography, nevertheless provides succinct analyses of the works preceding him, and serves as a valuable starting point for modern scholarship on the KKK.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1935).

<sup>13</sup> William Peirce Randel, *The Ku Klux Klan: A Century of Infamy* (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1965); Bernard Weisberger, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography," *The Journal of Southern History* 25, 4 (Nov. 1959): 427-447.

The first iteration of the KKK is the one with the largest historiography, having existed during a flashpoint in American History. While much of the work prior to the 1960s, some important scholarly works tackled the most prominent obstacle to scholarship of the Second KKK: religion. In his 1956 article "A Note on the Relationship between the Protestant Churches and the Revived Ku Klux Klan," Robert Moats Miller approached the subject of widespread Protestant support for the KKK during the 1920s and 1930s, noting a distinct lack of public support from various denominational institutions. Miller's work, though slight and seemingly meant as little more than an addendum to the greater body of work, nevertheless allows for the historian to approach the Second Ku Klux Klan as less than a foregone conclusion. The examples he provides, such as the vitriol the various large, influential Protestant publications levelled against the contemporary KKK of the 1920s, serve to illustrate the rather broad distaste for KKK actions, even if they did meet with national support.<sup>14</sup>

By far the largest area of scholarship during the 1950s and 1960s was that of the rise and fall of the Second Klan. While historians since the founding in 1915 have marked on the causation being linked to the release of D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, one of the earliest works that analyzed the KKK founder, William Joseph Simmons, was George Brown Tindall's *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*. By juxtaposing Simmons' unscrupulous personality and nature with the economic progress of the New South's interwar years, Tindall leaves implicit questions about the place the KKK occupied during this time—namely the Second Klan acting as an agent for social cohesion among reactionary elements in white

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Moats Miller, "A Note on the Relationship between the Protestant Churches and the Revived Ku Klux Klan," *The Journal of Southern History* 22, 3 (1956): 355–68.

American society. Tindall's work thus is a cornerstone for later historians to engage with in regards to the society and change surrounding the second Klan.<sup>15</sup>

One of the most pivotal works of the 1960s was David M. Chalmers's *Hooded Americanism*, an analysis of interwar KKK activity and motivation. While the work is notably choppy, when taken with Tindall's more comprehensive social analysis of the time, Chalmers's work helps provide a window into the scholarship that would come just a few years later in the 1970s, with an explosion of local social histories and semiotic deconstructions that characterized the decade.<sup>16</sup>

While a wealth of dissertations during the mid-70s cover individual Klan chapters from 1866 until the 1970s, (William V. Moore's 1975 dissertation "A Symbolic Analysis of the Ku Klux Klan" and C. Blue Clark's 1976 "A History of the Ku Klux Klan in Oklahoma" among them), this trend is perhaps best characterized by Richard Melching's 1974 article "The Activities of the Ku Klux Klan in Anaheim, California, 1923-1925." Through contextualizing Klan activity with ultra-specific regional analyses, these social histories written throughout the 1970s and 1980s allowed for the reframing of further developments in the 1990s.<sup>17</sup>

By the 1990s, comprehensive attempts to analyze KKK activity came to the forefront. *Hooded Americanism*, then on its third edition, proved to be a mainstay of Klan scholarship. By the time of its third edition print in 1987, Chalmers had included a comprehensive analysis of Klan activity during the Civil Rights movement up to the Greensboro Massacre. This work, now indispensable, ushered in the modern age of scholarship along with Elizabeth Weaton's

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<sup>15</sup> George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967).

<sup>16</sup> David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1967).

<sup>17</sup> Richard Melching, "The Activities of the Ku Klux Klan in Anaheim, California, 1923-1925," *Southern California Quarterly* 56, 2 (1974), 175-196.